

# ANARCHY RE-ENACTED

by Peter Cadogan

In Britain anarchism is much practised and little preached. As the DIY movement, the voluntary sector and free-lancing are our witness, countless people act like anarchists without knowing it. It is mostly a post-1956 development. Before that date the field was taken by the received institutions of church, state and Victorian philanthropy. World War II had just wiped out the servant classes.

This partly explains why this book 'For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice' has taken so long to get born. Its Editor, David Goodway, identifies the heyday of anarchism as from 1880 to 1914 and adds that it was "a negligible influence" in Britain and the Anglo-Saxon world, i.e. its history is mainly Latin and Slav.

Goodway describes anarchism "as combining a socialist critique of capitalism with a liberal critique of socialism." The defeat of anarchism by Lenin, Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler and Franco rendered anarchism peripheral until now when "anarchism seems currently to be in the process of removing itself from its consignment to the scrapheap of history."

Part of the trouble is that if anarchism is only a critique what is it *sui generis*? To date no one has found out. Written between the lines of this pioneering book is the ominous truth that to date the worst enemies of anarchists have been other anarchists and libertarians. Divided we fell. So it is back to sources and starting all over again.

All of a sudden the matter has become extremely urgent. The eleven

"You'll have to do this problem over."



authors of this book did not know about the revolutions of 1989 when they put pen to paper or how germane to immediate action their thinking was to become.

Six countries have just made a historic and successful bid for freedom, nine if you count the Baltic states; Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union are disintegrating; statist communism and socialism have become dirty words.

But what are they to do next? Copy the Western market and parliamentary centralism? Do that after using all the best anarchist words and acting accordingly? Spontaneity, diversity, freedom, justice, equality, autonomy, self-determination, people-power, anti-militarism, direct democracy - all enshrined in action - what more can we want? Apparently a great deal. These great values are not conjoined by any workable theory, they have no standing structured dimension. After a hundred years we have no anarchist political theory on offer, no theory of construction, only an outdated critique. So we watch as McDonalds, the Adam Smith Institute, the World Bank and the Japanese pile in. God help anarchism! It is apparent that they will have to provide us with answers.

I have it on apparently good authority that the rapidest growing party is that of the Abstentionists and that 45% in the GDR will abstain. I just hope that that is right. What they should surely be going for is five Land elections in the GDR not just one General Election - surely that is a minimal start down freedom's road? How else, in practice, to pull the rug from under the centralists? (The Lande of the GDR was abolished by the SED Government, and Departments, on the lines of those in France, set up to prevent any suggestion of regional autonomy.)

The accumulative evidence of this book shows that the received 'fathers' of contemporary anarchism - Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta - all 'advanced' into separate cul-de-sacs of their own making. They had no common view of the workings of the human psyche, no agreed counter-economics, no concerted metapolitics and no argument about ends and means. The result was a chaos through which the tyrants of the Right and the Left proceeded to drive coach-and-horses into totalitarianism.

We need a new terminology, one that does not drone on endlessly about people as economic units or political victims, one that forgets the name of Karl Marx. How flat, how boring, how divisive it all was! Consider Havel's language: "Every work of the spirit is a small re-enactment of the miracle of Being, a small recreation of the world." Shortly before he went on to lead a successful revolution he was asked by Mark Frankland of *THE OBSERVER*: "Why has the Czech opposition been moral rather than political, and shouldn't it be thinking more in terms of a political programme?" Havel replied:

"Experience of a totalitarian system of the Communist type emphatically make clear on thing which I hope has universal validity. The prerequisite for everything is moral."

Politics really should be ethics put into practice. Any challenge to a totalitarian system of this kind must start from a moral challenge. This means taking a moral stand not for practical purposes in the hope that it will bring results, but on principle. Naturally such a stand may or may not bring political results." 30.7.89.

A moral stand means that certain things are right and certain things are wrong - and that's it. The individual and the community are the tests - class is not. Is a course of action life-affirming or life-denying? Does it serve freedom and the imagination? These are the tests. We need that other set of libertarian exemplars that 'organised anarchists' all too easily ignore: Winstanley, Blake, Nietzsche and Tolstoy; and the activists Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and the people-power people from Eastern Europe. Anarchism will then make a belated arrival in the real world.

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Peter Marshall opens up the new territory. How did Godwin, Stirner and Kropotkin regard human nature? "Godwin held firm to his view that human beings are potentially rational and that it is to the development of our reason that we are to look for the improvement of our social condition." This might or might not be true a thousand years hence, but how today does reason weigh against feelings, myths, customs, self-interest, conformity and ignorance? Exit Godwin.

Stirner believed that self-interest is the sole good and that right is merely might: "What you have the power to be, you have the right to." And "nothing is more to me than myself." Politically the best he could suggest was a spontaneous union of egoists, little different from "Adam Smith's enlightened self-interest." Yet at the same time his egoism indicated the valid moral ground of individuation within the social picture, even though he ignored that picture. But a marginal point can never constitute a base for a workable political philosophy - so Stirner is out.

Kropotkin believed that anarchism and the mortals with which it deals "must be treated by the same methods as natural science." But we are not minerals, we are not plants and we are more than animals. *Homo sapiens* is post-evolution, we may look at human organs through the microscope but there is no way we can deal with the human spirit in that way. For that we need the arts, history and philosophy.

In *Mutual Aid* Kropotkin argued the exact opposite to Stirner: "we maintain that under any circumstances sociability is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life and nature has to be recognised as the first ethical teacher of man." Peter Marshall concludes: "Kropotkin's evolutionary perspective (mutual aid) is important, but his ethical naturalism is untenable. There are no values to be discovered in nature; all values are human creations." Kropotkin departs.

Peter Marshall then recharges the vacuum. "Unlike other species we have emerged from the natural world to become thinking beings. The human mind is uniquely capable of conceptual thought, symbolic communication and self-consciousness. In addition, human society itself has created new needs, such as the need for productive work, loving relations and a meaningful relationship with the world. We are both the products and the agents of history. It is our consciousness that sets us free."

Robert Graham looks at the role of contract in anarchist ideology and in particular at Proudhon's swinging denunciation of Rousseau's theory of "a contract between the individual and the state, rather than as a contract between individuals themselves." To Proudhon society was a conglomeration of individuals busily contracting with each other and bound to probity as one might be in a family. Would that it might have worked out like that! But it was not to be. Big businesses, high finance, imperialism and war rendered Proudhon's hopes and assumptions invalid.

Bakunin on the other hand focussed "not on the abstract 'free individual' but on the social conditions which make the emergence of such a person possible." But as those conditions were under the control of those who believed in neither the free individual nor the conditions of freedom-facilitation (except for themselves) that formula turned out to be no more fertile than Proudhon's. Inequality and powerlessness are set up and protected by the State and all centralised states, no matter how labelled, block the way to freedom. Free association, structured as collective self-empowerment, is the goal and for this we need people-power, direct democracy. Robert Graham does not turn his back on government of some sort.

"It is perfectly consistent of the anarchist proponents of free agreement to

support it when it is conceived as giving political expression to the ideals of self-obligation and individual autonomy which they support. While this may commit the anarchist to some sort of political authority, it is not the same kind of authority as that claimed by the State."

In his study of anarchist theory of history Alan Carter confronts Marx. It is not true that the State is just the executive committee of the bourgeoisie (as Marx argued). The State has an Army, a police force, prisons, a civil service and vast bureaucracy. Its maintenance requires massive taxation - the machine has become a thing in its own right. It might transform the mode of production because it is in its interests to do so i.e. "in order to pay its personnel." It follows, therefore, that "the State is not an appropriate tool for bringing about a classless post-capitalist society." He does not quite get to the point of saying that the Army is the State, but he quotes Lenin in 1919 saying much the same thing: "All our efforts must be exerted to the very utmost to bring about an economic revival without which a real increase in our country's defence potential is inconceivable."

Geoffrey Ostergaard's 'Indian Anarchism: the curious case of Vinoba Bhave, anarchist 'Saint of Government', inscribes the name and works of Bhave in the canon of received anarchism. For most of us this will be new territory and it is most refreshing. Let Vinoba speak for himself:

"If I am under some other person's command, where is my self-government? Self-government means ruling your own self. It is one mark of *swaraj* (self-rule) not to allow any outside power in the world to exercise control over oneself. And the second mark of *swaraj* is not to exercise power over any others. These two things together make *swaraj*: no submission and no exploitation."

But structure that! Vinoba himself did not succeed.

Nick Rider's essay on the Barcelona rent strike of 1931 is probably too specialist for this book, certainly for this reader. Its background documentation is extraordinarily detailed. It merits a place in an encyclopaedic symposium on the Spain of



the 'thirties.

Carl Levy's paper on Italian anarchism 1870/1926 is a brilliant piece of work. He quotes Salvemini: "If the anarchists are not careful, their enemies will write their history." Not over Italy they won't, Levy is seeing to that. It is a story of extraordinary internal division with Malatesta carrying the banner but mostly from London where he was over-impressed by the success of the great dock strike of 1889. Kropotkin has pointed out how the very success of that strike switched statist socialism into mere careerism. It didn't do that to Malatesta, it just reduced his horizons, inhibited new thinking.

The tragedy is that for all their good intentions a number of Italian anarchists did incredible disservice to the cause in the 1890s when they turned to the bomb, the bullet and the dagger. Levy lists some of their leading victims: Carnot the President of France in 1894, Canovas the PM of Spain in 1897, the Empress Elizabeth of Austria in 1898, and King Umberto of Italy in 1900. Then there were the innocents who got caught in the cross-fire. The whole of the Left suffered from the repressive legislation enacted against the terrorists. The anarchist movement "synonymous with terrorism" was "nearly completely destroyed" by the Italian state. We have all suffered ever since.

Malatesta himself condemned terrorism, but from London and ineffectively. Nothing inhibits anarchism more to this day than an unwillingness to face the problem of war, violence and terror as Tolstoy did. Carl Levy does it by inference. Peter Marshall is more explicit:

"The resort to violence to transform society, however, which has been a minor but significant trend in the anarchist tradition, is inevitably self-defeating. As the major revolutions this century - the Russian, the Chinese, the Cuban - have only too vividly demonstrated, it is impossible to use authoritarian means to realise libertarian ends."

Even that does not go far enough. Killing people is wrong, cruelty is a synonym for evil, it has to be stopped. That is the moral position. To be kind is good, unkindness is

bad. War has to go. Of course it is never as simple as that. Tyranny and colonialism are such that there are such things as just wars and that means killing as the lesser evil, the greater being submission to tyranny - so this is not a pacifist position, it is a moral and historical one. Folk wisdom, usually right, has it that sometimes we have to be cruel to be kind. Wars, in Europe and North America, are nearly wound down. They will cease, said Kant in 1794, when they are no longer feasible and have become too expensive. Those conditions, combined with the end of empires, have now arrived in the West. A war cycle, that lasted for 10,000 years, is ending. Extraordinary prospects open up, the challenge to the imagination is unprecedented.

That is exactly why this book is so important. That fact that it is also a publisher's birth certificate for the *Anarchist Research Group* and the *Bulletin of Anarchist Research* makes it personal to present readers. It is always good to arrive.

## OPPOSITIONAL CULTURAL CURRENTS AND CONTEMPORARY ANARCHISM

by Karen Goaman

(Ed. note... This is an abridged version of the talk for the A.R.G., 7 April 1990. I am publishing this because people often ask for copies of our ARG papers, and although many of them find their way into print, the groups itself seldom publishes anything but the BAR.)

This is a summary of the research I am doing (for a PhD thesis in anthropology), which focuses on a series of intersecting circles of people engaged in anti-authoritarian cultural interventions (which I will refer to from now on as the 'cultural current'); my research also focuses more broadly on the anarchist movement, which forms an important background and tradition to these more particular currents. My detailed research is confined to Britain (mostly London and Glasgow), but anarchist currents on the continent and in North America form important connexions which will also be explored.

The interventions of the 'cultural current' consist to a large extent of writing and publishing in the form of self-publishing, informal publishing and 'small press' activity - that is, non-commercial and outside mainstream publishing and distribution systems. And it will be this publishing and distributing end of the anarchist movement that I will be focusing on, rather than the direct action/activist end, though I intend to include in my thesis an overview of the various parts of contemporary anarchism and activist publications too.

The papers and periodicals published by the cultural current include *Smile*, *Vague*, *Here and Now* (the last three having been cited in an article about the Situationists in Britain as 'post-situationist' magazines: George Robertson in *Block*), the *Edinburgh Review*, and *Variant*; individuals involved in *Here and Now* in Scotland, and also the *Edinburgh Review*, also organize meetings and events of the 'Free University'. In terms of book publishing and distribution, there is Counterproductions/Aporia Press in London, AK Distribution in Stirling, Scotland, which now has a very large list, and A Distribution (which is mainly anarchist and Situationist) in London and USA.

The Situationist tradition has both influenced and been influenced by anarchism, both emphasizing the primacy of transforming not just systems of oppression but the whole of public and private life. The Situationists took up the idea of the revolution or reinvention of everyday life, and proclaimed the importance of creating situations that disrupt and question customary ways of thinking and behaving. Writing was a major critical weapon of

Situationists, who also made use of irony and forms of 'Détournement' ('subversion - the devaluation and re-use of present and past cultural production, destroying the message while hijacking its impact (Larry Lawin *Buffo*)).

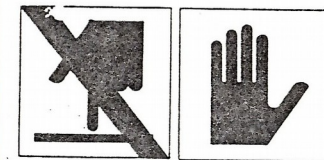
The cultural current, in terms of ideas and interventions, have a great deal of congruence with both anarchism and the Situationists, and though a few individuals might resist the identification I have made of their interventions with anarchist and Situationist traditions, many individuals have been directly influenced by these.

The cultural current are linked by a disillusionment with the institutionalized, mainstream or straight left and with its increasing professionalization (eg Charter 88). They share with anarchism a rejection of the state, of centralized authority and hierarchical orders, of parliamentary politics, of vanguardism, of the notion of an elite of leaders or intellectuals who impose ideas of others, of the idea of revolution as a seizing of power (which merely creates the same old order); they also share the ideal, which I think holds in both anarchist and Situationist traditions, of transforming everyday life, of bypassing systems of control, creating autonomous worlds and their own reality, and attempting to understand themselves in a new way.

One question I will be attempting to discuss in my thesis is how far these ideals can be or are being taken without merely forming a ghetto of like-minded people, and how far ideas can be communicated outside the particular milieu. One characteristic that I think could be said to distinguish the 'cultural current' from the more mainstream anarchist current is that the former are to some extent attempting to move outside their immediate milieu in order to communicate ideas and viewpoints to mainstream institutions and the mainstream media.

For example, Counterproductions have stalls at the London Book Fair as well as the Small Press and Anarchist book fairs; Stewart Home (who writes and publishes *Smile*, wrote *The Assault on Culture* and an anarcho-punk novel) has also (like several individuals in London as part of the 'cultural current') shown work at several shows in art galleries, and has given a talk and spoken at a conference at the ICA, and also advised on the ICA Situationist exhibition last year. One exhibition, *Ruins of Glamour*, *Glamour of Ruins* (held at Chisenhale Studios, London 1986) was vandalized, mainly through graffiti, with slogans such as 'This is another radical wank', two days after it opened; this was apparently carried out by people involved in the anarchist movement who were critical of Home's intervention in the art world (he apparently has a reputation of something of a poser amongst the anarchist milieu). One more example of an attempt to capture a wider audience and mainstream media attention was the recent event 'Self Determination and Power', held in Govan, January 1990, organized by the Free University (the same people who produce the Glasgow *Here and Now* and also the *Edinburgh Review*); this was organized joint with a magazine Scottish Child, and the key speaker was Chomsky. It succeeded in attracting features in many mainstream newspapers, and was oversubscribed several times its capacity of 200 people. The Free University people were however disappointed in the event as a means of exchanging and communicating ideas, particularly to the relatively large sections of the audience more affiliated to Scottish Child (who were generally from areas such as education and the caring professions).

Stewart Home has used the term *samizdat* (a Russian word meaning self-publishing) to characterize the dissident tradition of politico-cultural agitation and protest of which he sees himself a part, which is self-organized, its adherents often carrying out actions and simultaneously documenting them (The *Assault on Culture*; 1988; 102). This has in particular been a characteristic of the avant garde traditions, from Dada, surrealism, lettrism to the Situationists. While long-standing anarchist papers such as *Freedom* and *Black Flag* have continued to report and document anarchist activity, anarchism has been criticized for being a largely 'commemorative' movement (Gombin) or an antiquarian one, though anarchists by necessity have had to



reclaim the histories they have been written out of.

Home also emphasises his use of 'historification', by which he consciously attempts to appropriate the processes by which those intervening in cultural or 'arts' spheres in our society seek legitimization for their work (for example a novelist or poet seeks legitimization from the domains of mainstream literary criticism and publishing, an 'artist' seeks legitimization from the art world). In this sense, it is an attempt to hijack and subvert by reclaiming the systems of power and privilege which control what is reproduced and sold as commodity by exclusion; it is also a means of proclaiming that anyone can do it (for example Home set out to prove - and did so successfully - that anyone could enter the art world without formal training). Home is also careful to ensure that a copy of each of his published work is lodged in the British Library, in order that his version of historical events is recorded for future time; this has elicited a degree of antagonism from a few individuals who are less assiduous and less self-conscious or less egotistical, depending on your viewpoint, about self-publicity and self-historification.

Before I go on to identify the ideas and traditions that have influenced the 'cultural current', I want to talk briefly about why I chose to do this research. My initial introduction to libertarian left and anarchist ideas was sparked off through a course as part of my anthropology degree on Mediterranean anthropology, which touched on Spanish anarchism, and I began reading papers like *Solidarity*, *Freedom and Class War*. At the same time, the prospect of writing a thesis on something as broad as the anarchist/libertarian left movement in contemporary Britain seemed daunting; I wanted



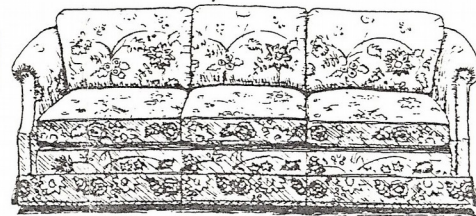
It could be said that there are two main levels in most research in humanities; firstly, the interpretive, that is the level of achieved or intended meanings; and, secondly, the explanatory, that is why things are happening (for example a ritual exists because of economic, aesthetic concerns or whatever).

In this sense, I am more interested in the interpretive level as the basis for communicating what is going on. I am however also interested in critically evaluating what I am learning about, in articulating debates that arise within and between various currents, and in learning about the phenomenological level - how an individual or group experiences what they are doing.

My research then is motivated not just by intellectual interest but by a wish to construct knowledge about the world that is meaningful and even useful. It seems to me that increasingly the consensus of how social change will occur has moved on, away from the old ideas of seizing power; and that this has arisen through currents such as anarchism, punk, feminism, the ecology movement. I would argue that theorists such as Foucault and Derrida, who become taken up by academia as being on the cutting edge of thought, in exposing the systems of control and legitimization that underpin our civilization, are in fact merely currents and movements of politically committed people, but that this occurs not in the privileged space of academic discourse but in non-elitist milieus that are open to everyone.

While my research is underpinned by my own political commitment to libertarian left/anarchist/anti-authoritarian ideas, I am not attempting to fit the currents concerned to a grand plan of history, looking for subjects for social change, or encapsulating reality in theory or laws of history. My interest is in ideas, values and ethics that seem to me to reclaim humanity and to have potential value in social transformation.

Two of the themes that seem important to me in this research are, firstly, that of identity, since for me one's identity is as important as one's



political position (for example a libertarian political position would ideally be underpinned by an identity that strives to be open, tolerant, and libertarian rather than dogmatic and authoritarian); and, secondly, a theme I have already mentioned of learning from the past, which is a key element in much of the anarchist tradition and the cultural current. Amongst the latter, however, there is a concern to learn from the failings of the past, and in a non-commemorative way. In *Here and Now*, there has been a kind of embargo on anyone mentioning the sacred years 1936, 1956 and 1968, whatever their interesting points, in order to try and live without the comfort of their mystical guarantee.

The questions that inform my intervention in this research include the following:

- How individuals create their own worlds and how they experience this phenomenologically.
- How individuals perceive their own intellectual history, that is how they arrive at their political perspective.
- The degree to which there is a coherence of ideas, particularly amongst the 'cultural current'.
- How far are these currents ghettoized, and how can ideas be communicated to people outside the milieu.

I will end by first outlining my main criticism of the anarchist and cultural current, and lastly by proclaiming the positive elements of these and why I think they are important.

There are two ironies associated with the currents that I am learning about: firstly, that the (small-scale but consistent) international and national exchange and distribution of radical ideas has been enabled by the existence of capitalist technology. Cheaper and easier access to word processors and xeroxing machines has enabled papers, pamphlets and books to be published relatively economically, and the ease of international communication allows publications to come to the attention of interested people in different countries. I am continually impressed by the numbers (and, as I've said, quality) of the radical texts around now, though people with long experience of the anarchist and related informal publishing scene disagree as to whether or not there are more or less publications around now than during the anarchist revival through punk that occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The second irony is that the main form of communication of ideas is through print and writing. As Diamond has written: 'Writing itself was initially used to keep tax, census and other administrative records; it was, in short, an instrument for the recording of official histories, invented by bureaucrats. The oral tradition, the ceremony, the round of daily life, the use and manufacture of tools by the people at large did not depend on writing... The compulsive rite of civilization is writing... it reduced the complexities of experience to the written word... symbols become explicit; they lost a certain richness... For writing splits consciousness in two ways - it becomes more authoritative than talking, thus degrading the meaning of speech and oral

tradition; and it makes it possible to use words for the political manipulation and control of others.' (pp.3-4).

On the other hand, radical pamphleteering has been going on since the 17th century, and of course flourished in the interregnum when licenses of printing presses were less restricted. Up until the 1850s, newspapers themselves tended to be radical, existing to challenge and question dominant structures, and it was only when advertising got a foothold that the bias of newspapers became right wing and pro-capitalism and the state.

Most individuals with whom I have spoken as part of my research have said that it was through reading texts rather than through discussion that they began to question the state, power, capitalism and relations of exploitation and oppression. I think though that for many people the initial texts might be ones recommended or passed on by someone whose opinion they respect.

One of my own critical perspectives on the currents I am learning about is that, apart from the activist/direct action end of anarchism, the basis for these currents is print and writing, rather than what Mo Dodson has termed a socio-sensuous culture.

*'Even the activist/direct action end of anarchism relies on papers and pamphlets to communicate its ideas and intended actions.'*

*It was the anarchist Emma Goldman who communicated her insight that there was no point in a revolution if you could not dance. Walter J. Ong in his book Orality and Literacy discusses how print and writing creates a certain way of thinking which interiorizes and privatizes experience, perception of the world and of yourself. Writing and reading about spontaneity goes little way to being spontaneous.*

The hippy and punk movements of the last decades had a mass appeal I think because they offered a multi-dimensional experience, a form of 'socio-sensuous' culture, despite the commercialization of these movements. In the radical currents I am learning about there may be a gig or a band after, for example, the Anarchist or Small press book fairs, but this does not seem to me to articulate anything central or provide a cultural or social experience in which to ground a renewed human interaction.

The 'cultural current' emphasizes the importance of culture as an integral part of social transformation, but the basis of their activities is print or exhibiting in art galleries. It could be said that cults such as the Temple of Psychick Youth provide a form of multi-dimensional culture (music forms an important part of their interaction), but this sets out to be cultist and 'deviant', using occult mysticism which, I would argue, is inherently reactionary.

*'and it is fashionable on the contemporary New Left to emphasize the role of 'culture', with Stewart Hall arguing for some fusion between for example his social pleasures (eg drinking in the pub) with the duties of the politically committed such as meeting.'*

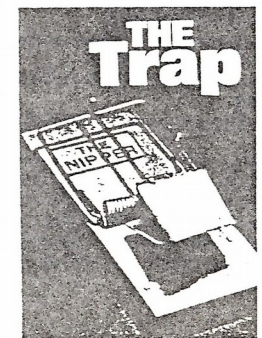
Stewart Home's engagement in cultural activity (following a line of tradition he himself delineates in his book *The Assault on Culture*) has attempted to create a multi-dimensional experience. For example, he organized the Festival of Plagiarism in Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, 1989, taking place over a week; participants were able to show work in the gallery or organize their own related events, bands played on a couple of evenings, and participants spent part or all of the week there, in the gallery or pub etc, sleeping on available floors in Glasgow. However the context of the 'festival' was decidedly a high art one, an avant garde tradition which permeated the videos shown, the 'artwork' on display, and the performances. The avant garde tradition consciously sets out to disrupt convention, and refuses to accept the conventional use of language. In this sense I think such interventions cannot escape their elitist appeal and remain ghettoized; Stewart Home argues however that he succeeded in catching the attention of night club goers (ie. not the normal art audience) as well as one local man with no previous interest in 'art' or galleries, and who initially dropped in by chance.

What I am arguing for therefore is politico-cultural intervention that is multi-dimensional and socio-sensuous, but that is also based at least initially on the conventions and codes that already make up our everyday lives, such as music, dance, gossip, humour, in social public spaces. This is difficult, and increasingly so, in Britain and North America which have always lacked the continental tradition of public spaces where people can hang around without having to do or buy everything (a point made in *No Reservations* from *News from Everywhere*).

The Class War paper is I think successful in appropriating the tabloid form of gossip and sensation in a very humorous way. The ideal would be the re-appropriation of these forms of pleasure also in a social and face-to-face way.

But a third irony is my once again writing about socio-sensuous and multi-dimensional culture rather than doing or being it.

Despite this critical perspective, I think that the cultural current in particular but also the anarchist and related libertarian currents are important in that they are attempting to politicize culture in a way that has not been done before, using cultural resistance rather than agitprop, and attempting to transform their daily lives and intervene as far as possible independently of mainstream commercial systems. They are also concerned to learn from the past, not merely as an antiquarian or intellectual exercise, but in order to re-use what is of value in the project of social transformation, but to avoid repeating the mistakes and failures of past traditions.





however to explore these ideas since I had begun to find discussed in this kind of literature questions that I regarded as most important and which are largely ignored in academic texts, particularly in terms of analysis of the state and structures of oppression and also around praxis and intervention in our lived worlds - cultural or political, violent and non-violent. This literature also seemed to me to reinstate the human being and humanity in a perspective that was underpinned by anti-authoritarian values and ethics, in contrast to the cynicism, nihilism and anti-humanism of the poststructuralist/postmodern current of thought that I had previously been to some extent absorbed in, drawn initially by its anarchistic elements and critique of Marxism.

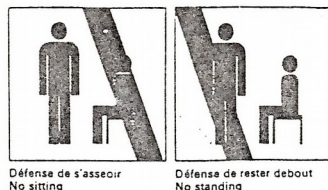
In 1986 I came across the work of various people involved at that time in some visual art shows - including Stewart Home, Ed Baxter, Andy Hopton, Stefan Szczelkun, Glyn Banks and Hannah Vowles, Simon Dickson. This was initially through the show *Ruins of Glamour...* which my husband has reviewed; he passed on to me various written broadsheets (for exhibitions) and papers such as *Smile*. Stewart Home was particularly forthcoming both in terms of passing on copies both of his own work and publications such as *Here and Now*, *Vague and Variant*. I found that many of these texts contained very incisive critical analyses of our cultural condition - more relevant and concerned with lived everyday worlds (in the same ways as I subsequently found in Situationist texts) that the critical theory I have read from the institutionalized academic world. It occurred to me at this point to focus my thesis research on learning about this particular current.

Originally my aim was to do a comparative study of two different means of working for social change - comparing the 'cultural current' who intervene through cultural and critical activity, with the work of people, part of the alternative/ecological movement, who are implementing the practise of permaculture, a radical form of land use involving perennial crops and integrated food production and living systems. Their practise is therefore exemplary rather than critical. This comparative approach became too much for one thesis, though I may include in my thesis a chapter on permaculture in order to illustrate a very different form of acting towards transforming the world.

From an initial focus on a small group of people's activities and publications, I became aware of the wide range and quality of publications mainly from the anarchist movement and especially in Britain and North America. It was through reading this literature as well as texts such as Richard Gombin's *Origins of the New Left* and *The Radical Tradition*, and Rubel and Crump's anthology *Non-Market Socialism in the 19th and 20th centuries*, that I began to see a thread that connected various lines of thought that shared a rejection of the state, of party and parliamentary politics, and the institutionalized forms of opposition. These lines of thought seem to me to be the following:

- 1) The anarchist tradition
- 2) the libertarian socialist tradition (eg. Castoriadis and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, *Solidarity* in Britain, Chomsky in USA)
- 3) the left communist/ ultra leftist tradition, with its roots in council communism (which influenced, along with anarchism, the Situationists), with writers such as Camatte and Barrot
- 4) the Situationist tradition
- 5) the Autonomist movement on the continent, especially in Italy with theorists such as Tony Negri
- 6) the poststructuralist current (eg. Baudrillard, Deleuze & Guattari, Lyotard, Foucault)
- 7) the critique of power that came out of feminist texts and discussions.

There are of course many cross connexions between these currents, some perhaps lesser known examples that Baudrillard was Henri Lefebvre's teaching assistant at Nanterre University on a sociology course in 1957-8, attended by Debord and Vaneigem. The Autonomist Negri now writes with the poststructuralist Guattari (Negri is now in exile in France, having been released from prison). Lyotard was at one time a member of *Socialisme ou*



Barbarie.

I would say that the 'cultural current' have been influenced by some or all of these strains of thought and intervention. To name a few writers who are influential, I would include Debord and Vaneigem, Negri, Baudrillard, Andre Gorz, Murray Bookchin, Fredy Perlman, John Zerzan, Castoriadis, Camatte, Barrot. There is also an interest in 18th century radicals such as Winstanley and Abizerzer Coppe, whose texts Counterproductions publish.

Amongst the people in London there is an interest in a few cult type influences (eg. J G Ballard) and Stewart Home and Tom Vague have associations with the cult Temple of Psychick Youth.

Other direct sources of influence and inspiration of the 'cultural current' (all of which, like the lines of thought cited above, have also influenced elements of the anarchist movement) are the following:

- 1) The punk movement, with its emphasis on attacking notions of privilege and identities (eg 'artist', 'musician') that confer on one individual a privilege that excludes others or denies to others an equal gift as in the 'cult of genius' that permeates our culture. In punk, the notion of do-it-yourself was paramount, with the creation of fanzines - non-commercial informally published music/ fan papers, an activity which continues today.

The anarchist movement underwent a revival as a result of punk, which also resurrected Situationist ideas in slogans. People involved in the cultural current and anarchism who were directly involved in the punk movement include Tom Vague, Stewart Home, Ramsey Kanaan (AK Distribution), Malcolm

Dickson (Variant), and several people I've spoken to saw themselves as having consumed the attitude of punk.

2) The oppositional avant garde 'tradition' - Dada, Surrealism, the Lettrists, COBRA, Situationists. This is a critical relationship which is against the 'pro-Situationist' type of activity (such as Larry Law's, though his compilations are well read and quoted in the cultural current), and strongly against the media/fashion interest in avant garde forms.

The forms of the avant garde tradition - the disruption of conventional, familiar and routinized expectations - is an element in the cultural current; but, for instance, Stewart Home attacks high culture, and claims to use popular cultural forms (such as his anarcho-punk short stories and novels) though it could be argued that these are high not popular culture, and certainly he uses high culture forums (eg art galleries) for his interventions.

Despite the influence of the avant garde tradition, both the anarchist movement and the cultural current are strongly anti-bohemian, anti-hippy, and, in Home's case, anti-art.

The cultural current has links and also differences with other strains such as:

- 1) The radical/political end of the counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s. But it is very far from the simplistic notions of freedom generated by the hippy movement ("let it all hang out") and its lack of theoretical analysis, particularly of the state.

The current is very important I think in its concern to learn from the past (as Marx said, to ignore history is to be condemned to repeat it), and has taken on board poststructuralist and feminist discussions around the idea that there is no essential self to be liberated, that our condition cannot simply be thrown off to allow us to be free, but that we can construct different ways of being through processes that entail self-criticism and self-reflexivity, an element that I think is and has long been characteristic of much libertarian thought. One of the people involved in *Here and Now* and the Free University sees the importance given to discarding sentimental humanitarian assumptions as one of the major differences between what I've called the 'cultural current' and anarchism. Anarchism retains a notion of freedom and the liberated subject as arrived at through a stripping away of oppression and control.

- 2) The cultural current and the anarchist movement cannot I think be said to be an *underground* current in the way the 1960s and early 1970s counterculture was, despite the fact that these contemporary currents are largely unheard of and invisible. In my definition, this is not an underground movement because it does not firstly have the vanguardist qualities associated with the term 'underground', nor the fascination with escapist activities such as drug taking, that appeared in the hippy movement to offer an identity of 'deviance' and rebellion, precisely because it was (and is) outlawed.
- 3) Nor can it be termed a 'subculture', since it lacks a single identity, or characteristics that could confer on a movement a kind of cult belonging.
- 4) The cultural current and anarchist movement have characteristics in common with the so-called 'new social movement' in as much as there is no central organizations; and, like 'new social movements', they do not agitate for new 'members'.

But both currents, though sympathetic to the concerns of new social movements such as feminist, black, gay movements, are critical of all single issue positions for some or all of the following reasons:

- a) because single issue positions do not guarantee radical critique of capitalism and of the state (see Webster's article *Here and Now*, no.5)
- b) because they take up one aspect of an individual's identity (for example,

one's womanness, blackness, gayness) as a basis of political action (see Webster again)

c) because both currents, and in particular the anarchist movement, perceive issues such as the ecological crisis, the oppression of women, blacks and gays, militarism and nuclear proliferation as being symptoms of a common underlying cause - capitalism, the state, hierarchical authority and exploitation. The ecological crisis in particular is seen as a logical result of capitalism, against which critical attack must be launched, rather than simply at the effects of capitalism.

Still on the subject of new social movements, I want to add that I am critical of the recent fashion in academia (eg Habermas, Wallerstein) for heralding new social movements as the new agent for social change, to replace the old revolutionary subject, the working class. It is interesting that of the currents I identified earlier as sharing a common link and similar perspectives, only the Autonomist movement has a theory of the 'new social worker' as a new agent of social change; the others tend to reject a focus on any one sector of society as being any more likely to be radicalized than another (though Class War and other class struggle anarchist groups continue to emphasize the working class struggle).

I am also very critical of the sociological studies of new social movements that have been made by Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci. These take a purely sociological approach and ignore what seems to me to be the basis of these movements which is the history of thought and political intervention - that is the political and intellectual elements of these movements.

